

# Helping Children Cope with Tragedy

When a tragedy strikes, the stress and anxiety can be overwhelming for the entire family, but especially for children. A child's sense of vulnerability, lack of understanding and difficulty in communicating their emotions can make them particularly sensitive in disaster situations.

Here are suggestions for helping children through these difficult times:

- Speak simply and honestly about the situation. This helps avoid the fear of the unknown.
- Make time for children. Just a moment of your time, a hug or a reassuring word may be all children need to feel more safe and secure in an emotional situation.
- Listen. Answer their questions as much as you can.
- Reassure them. Use statements like, "It's scary right now, but it will get better and we'll always take care of you."
- As much as possible, maintain routines. This helps children feel stable and secure.
- Show love and support.
- Make sure children know that what has happened is not their fault. A child's imagination can take hold at times like these. They may think because they acted badly in some way, they helped cause the tragedy.
- Take care of your own emotions and stress. Children will reflect your anxiety or your calm attitude.
- Reassure your children that your family is safe in your/their home/s and efforts are taking place to help all the people affected by the disaster.
- Remember that during crises, children may revert to earlier behavior and act younger than their age. A child may be irritable or misbehave. This is normal for a child who is scared and doesn't understand a serious situation. Children need your extra patience at this time.